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ABSTRACT

An examination of cross-cultural toleration in South African university classrooms and speculation on the causes and effects of this toleration are presented in this paper. South African faculty attitudes are surveyed and compared against U.S. faculty attitudes. Findings expose the need for improvement regarding cross-cultural communication in the South African university classroom and an understanding of linguistic differences such as style, nonverbal behaviors, and high and low context communication process. Survey results are attached. (Author/DB)

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CROSS-CULTURAL TOLERATION AND ITS EFFECT ON CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES: A SURVEY OF SOUTH AFRICAN FACULTY MEMBERS

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CROSS-CULTURAL TOLERATION AND ITS EFFECT ON CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES: A SURVEY OF SOUTH AFRICAN FACULTY MEMBERS

This paper examines cross-cultural toleration in South African university classrooms and speculates on causes and effects of this toleration. South African faculty attitudes are surveyed and compared against U.S. faculty attitudes. Findings expose the need for improvement regarding cross-cultural communication in the South African university classroom.

INTRODUCTION

The February 11, 1990 release of Nelson Mandela marked another step in the reforms implemented in South Africa. Anti-apartheid reforms have been sought in practically all areas of South African life including economic, political, and educational reforms. This paper will focus on the current classroom situation in South African universities and how cross-cultural toleration can affect classroom communication. This analysis is intended to serve as an indicator of educational shortcomings, regarding cross-cultural communication in the classroom, and establish a need for modifications in this area.

Bhekumuzi Khumalo came to Denison University (Granville, Ohio) in 1986. He and others have come to the United States as part of a program Denison sponsors for non-white South African students. Regarding Khumalo's and others transition into the U.S. educational system, Don Schilling, co-director of the Denison program, sees the U.S. educational experience as being different for Khumalo and others in comparison to what they experience in their native educational system.

"They all come with stories of professors in South Africa . . . . There are Afrikaner professors who greatly believe in apartheid. They tell them so right out.
The atmosphere is adversarial between the instructor and students. It is a hostile rather than mutually supportive atmosphere" (Massie, 1990, p. 3B).

Schilling is encouraged by the growth of Khumalo and others experience after arriving in the U.S. "We see them come to a sense of self-confidence and self-understanding as a result of being in a more open society where their own performance determines their success or failure" (Massie, 1990, p. 3B). Before focusing on education in South Africa, a brief overview of the country will provide helpful context for the current situation.

SOUTH AFRICA AND APARTHEID

South Africa is roughly three times the size of California. Seventy-five percent of its population (of 36 million) is black, 14% white, 8% coloureds (mixed black/white/asian), and 3% asian & others. The chief commercial exports are gold, diamonds, uranium, platinum, chrome, and copper (Dostert, p. 93).

Race relations have long been controversial and, at present, much of the controversy stems from apartheid. Apartheid, a Boer word meaning separate, is a policy that provides for legalized compulsory separation of the races. This policy was instituted in 1948 when the National Party came to power. During the 1960's black rights were further

reduced due to the threat posed by the African National Congress (that Nelson Mandela led). In 1973, ten Black homelands were established that allowed for internal self government. In 1986 the U.S. and other countries increased sanctions against South Africa to discourage apartheid, including bans on investments, loans, South African exports into the U.S., and divestment in companies that operate in South Africa (Dostert, pp. 93-98). At present, the African National Congress continues to lead the movement against apartheid with support from various foreign elements.

The author visited South Africa two weeks during July, 1989. His reason for the visit was to present a workshop on cross-cultural communication in the classroom at the annual national meeting of the South African Applied Linguistics Association. The meeting was held at the University of Natal in Durban. The University of Natal is one of five universities that has openly rejected apartheid.

His visit allowed for observation of day-to-day life in South Africa. In comparison to U.S. standards, he observed limited meaningful black-white interaction. Interaction between blacks and whites evidenced indifference but very little overt anger. There seemed to be a peaceful coexistence for the most part; almost as if racially different persons were to be seen but not interacted with unless given a reason to do so. One gets the feeling each race knows "its place" and acts accordingly.

Local newspapers are full of articles and letters that

give an impression of the chasm that exists between black and white life in South Africa. In a typical letter to the editor a writer shares an opinion on segregation of public areas in Durban.

> We well remember those days when one could find a seat on a park bench where it was safe from a mugging or stabbing from layabouts; when one could stroll the Ampitheatre at night without fear of rape or worse; when libraries were quiet, pleasant places to visit without having to avoid the stretched out legs of some sleeping African; when queues in post offices were shorter; and when public toilets were fit and safe to use. (Buckman, 1989, p. 2)

This perspective is representative of the views expressed by many writers in South African newspapers. It is difficult to comprehend how devastating intoleration between blacks and whites must be on cross-cultural communication in the classroom. Speculation on this subject is a primary concern of this paper.

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Study of cross-cultural communication has increased significantly since World War II. World trade and international exchange have helped perpetuate this increase. As the classroom becomes more culturally diverse it is important faculty consider the cultural variables that are introduced in such a situation. These variables can serve as obstacles or as opportunities in the learning process. The

author proposes sensitivity with cross-cultural differences leads to cross-cultural awareness, which in turn leads to improved cross-cultural understanding. He contends these cultural variables are obstacles to learning in South Africa.

A survey, entitled "Cultural Bound Areas for Personal Reflection," is included at the end of this paper as Attachments #1, #2, and #3. These cultural bound areas are areas that can be interpreted and emphasized in significantly different ways depending upon an individual's cultural background. Thus, they can be obstacles to the learning process. The survey is based on an outline of culture bound areas which was created by the National Association of Developmental Education. This is a self reporting instrument. Faculty indicate their responses to each statement in each area: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Again, these are areas which are frequently interpreted and emphasized differently depending on the individual's cultural background. This instrument focuses on teacher expectations, standards, personal perspectives, approaches in common situations, and how these areas can benefit or detract from the classroom environment.

Awareness of these areas is also beneficial when working with the variety of subcultures that comprise individual cultures. Misunderstandings among subcultures are very similar to misunderstandings among international cultures. Both types of misunderstandings are based on differing frames

of reference. These differing frames of reference do not necessarily indicate opposite interpretations of the culture bound areas, rather they imply various interpretations on the same continuum (but differing in varying degrees depending on the cultural backgrounds compared).

Culture is the backdrop within which teaching and learning takes place. We all use our cultural background to "filter" what we are perceiving in the classroom. Thus, the faculty member can actually experience "culture shock" in his/her own classroom without leaving the country. Culture shock occurs when we experience confusion, anger, or despair as a result of unsuccessful attempts to make sense of cultural practices which are foreign to us. This usually occurs when we are outside of our own culture (in another country) but it can happen when dealing with culturally different individuals in our own culture. Culture shock usually involves four stages: the honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment stages.

The honeymoon stage occurs during our initial interactions with a new culture when we are intrigued with new places and new ways of living. The crisis stage occurs when we encounter a situation which we do not know how to resolve and we become frustrated. The recovery stage occurs after we have resolved the conflict and begin to enjoy the culture again. This situation will obviously be affected by a number of variables. Cross-cultural toleration within a given culture is such a variable.

A situation involving differing views on academic dishonesty (between the U.S. and China) exemplifies a culture shock situation that the author experienced while teaching in China. First, he enjoyed learning new aspects of the Chinese culture (honeymoon). Second, he observed students plagiarizing from outside sources when writing their papers (crisis). Third, he found plagiarism is a common practice in Chinese universities (recovery). Fourth, he told his students this was against the way he had been trained in the U.S. but that he would adopt the Chinese approach on the issue since he was in China (adjustment).

Improvement of classroom interaction through emphasis on cross-cultural understanding requires an appreciation of cross-cultural communication. Cross-cultural communication "occurs when two or more individuals with different cultural backgrounds interact together . . . . In most situations intercultural interactants do not share the same language. But languages can be learned and larger communication problems occur in the nonverbal realm" (Andersen, 1986). "Since we are not usually aware of our own nonverbal behavior it becomes extremely difficult to identify and master the nonverbal behavior of another culture. At times we feel uncomfortable in other cultures because we intuitively know something isn't right" (Andersen, 1987, pp. 2-3). "Because nonverbal behaviors are rarely conscious phenomena, it may be difficult for us to know exactly why we are feeling uncomfortable" (Gudykunst and Kim, 1984, p. 149).

The effect of the cultural backgrounds of interactants on human interaction is a crucial consideration. "Culture is the enduring influence of the social environment on our behavior including our interpersonal communication behaviors" (Andersen, 1987, p. 6). The culture of an individual dictates interpersonal behavior through "control mechanisms--plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call 'programs')--for the governing of behavior" (Geertz, 1973, p. 44). Thus, the processes for presentation of ideas (speaking) and the reception of ideas (listening) will understandably vary from culture to culture.

The implications of high and low context communication processes, across cultures, provides an example of the effect of culture on the interaction process. "A high-context communication message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted parts of the message" (Hall, 1976, p. 91). For instance, people who know each other very well can communicate through unexplicit messages which are not readily understandable to a third party. In high context situations or cultures information is integrated from the environment, the context, the situation, and from nonverbal cues that give the message meaning unavailable in the explicit verbal utterance" (Andersen, 1987, p. 22).

Low context messages (and cultures) are just the opposite of high context messages; most of the information is

in the explicit code (Hall, 1976). Low context messages must be elaborated, clearly communicated, and highly specific (Andersen, 1987, p. 22). The lowest context cultures are probably Swiss, German, North American (including the U.S.) and Scandanavian (Hall, 1976; Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). These cultures are preoccupied with specifics, details, and precise time schedules at the expense of context (Andersen, 1987, p. 22).

The highest context cultures are found in the Orient. China, Japan, and Korea are very high context cultures (Elliot, Scott, Jensen & McDonough, 1982; Hall, 1976). "Languages are some of the most explicit communication systems but the Chinese language is an implicit high context system" (Andersen, 1987, p. 23). Americans (from a low context culture) will complain Japanese (from a high context culture) never "get to the point." This is due to a failure to recognize that high context cultures must provide a context and setting and let the point evolve (Hall, 1984).

People in high context cultures expect more than interactants in low context cultures (Hall, 1976). Such expectations assume the other person will "understand unarticulated feelings, subtle gestures and environmental clues that people from low context cultures simply do not process. Worse, both cultural extremes fail to recognize these basic differences in behavior, communication, and context and are quick to misattribute the causes for their behaviors" (Andersen, 1987, p. 25). Similar degrees of

disparity on the high context-low context continuum can exist among subcultures within one culture.

Different perceptions of the culture bound areas are not always a matter of differing values. Values can be similar but the expression of these values, based on cultural communicative norms, can vary significantly. Cross-cultural understanding can become especially difficult because different perceptions of culture bound areas can be a matter of differing values and differing communication processes. A high degree of tolerance is beneficial. How faculty teach their classes can be more important (with this issue) than what we are teaching. That is, actions speak louder than words. Thus, a multicultural classroom environment that is sensitive to various cultural and subcultural backgrounds is going to help provide considerable understanding for students of all backgrounds. Obviously the faculty member has a direct influence on this classroom environment.

CULTURE BOUND SURVEY FINDINGS

The author has used the aforementioned survey at faculty workshops he's led, focusing on the multicultural classroom, in the U.S. and South Africa. Comparison and contrast of faculty responses to these survey areas can exemplify the void between U.S. and South African faculty perspectives. The survey was used in March, 1989 with 97 english/speech/linguistics faculty members at the annual Conference on Student Success Courses held in Orlando, Florida. The survey was also used in July, 1989 with 112

english/speech/linguistics faculty members at the annual meeting of the South African Applied Linguistics Association held in Durban. Neither group can offer a perfect standard to evaluate other nationalities by, but comparison and contrast does highlight differences that do exist in various cultures allowing for examination of why groups vary regarding cross-cultural perspectives.

Responses to the survey by South African faculty members are included as Attachment #1. One hundred and twelve participants were surveyed. The numbers noted on the survey are percentage responses to each area. Review of the survey responses indicates strong consistences in most areas. For instance, 87% prefer formal communication rather than informal communication with students, 78% consider dress and cleanliness as important, 89% believe academic preparation is the students responsibility, 89% feel respect for authority is important, and 84% state cheating should result in expulsion.

Responses to the survey by American faculty members are included as Attachment #2. Ninety seven participants were surveyed. The numbers noted on the survey are percentage responses to each area. Review of these survey responses, in contrast with the South African responses, indicates considerable diversity regarding faculty perspectives on the culture bound areas. American society is a "melting pot" culture. Perhaps this cultural diversity is a base for the diverse interpretations noted in the survey. Again, it is

important to remember there are no correct or incorrect responses to survey areas. The survey merely gauges respondent perspectives as they relate to cultural norms.

Attachment #3 compares and contrasts responses by U.S. and South African respondents. As noted at the top of the survey, American majority responses are indicated with an "x" and South African majority responses are indicated with an "o". Review of these responses indicates similarities and differences between the two groups. Most notable are four areas that show radically different perspectives. These are I.A. (teacher-student communication should be formal), I.F. (cheating should result in expulsion), II.A. (importance of treating students the same), and III.C. (respect for authority).

In each of the areas where responses differed, the South African group differed in favor of faculty dominance in the classroom. South African faculty indicated teacher-student communication should be formal, student cheating should result in expulsion, it is not necessary to treat students the same, and a preference for docile students. In contrast, the American group indicated teacher-student communication should be informal, student cheating should not result in expulsion, it is necessary to treat students the same, and a preference for aggressive students. Even in areas where both groups agreed, the South African group indicated stronger faculty dominance. In area I.E., 70% of the American respondents felt respect for authority was important compared

to 89% of the South African respondents who felt respect for authority was important.

CONCLUSION

Using faculty members as an indicator, and based on the information gathered with this survey, the South African academic community is not tolerant of cross-cultural diversity (when compared against the U.S. academic community). Faculty members who teach english, speech and linguistics in both cultures have been used as representative samples to generalize faculty perceptions regarding survey areas. The U.S. and South Africa have cultural diversity but the main difference is that South Africa has far less interaction among their culturally different populations. Integration is legislated in the U.S. while segregation (apartheid) is legislated in South Africa.

The author contends separation among racial groups leads to ignorance about other racial groups, which leads to fear of other racial groups. A symptom of this problem in South Africa is the institution of apartheid. Alex Boraine, executive director of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa, summarized a similar view in the South African press. "Many white South Africans have genuine deep-rooted fears . . . . the causes of such fears were largely attributable to widespread ignorance of black people . . . . Whites and blacks for the most part live in different worlds, and isolation breeds ignorance, which

brings with it fear" (Boraine, 1989, p. 3).

As long as this condition exists in South Africa the communicative climate in the classroom will surely suffer as a result of the lacking cross-cultural toleration. Awareness can be the first step toward social change. The author contends South African faculty can promote positive social change through emphasis on cross-cultural toleration in their classrooms.

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ATTACHMENT #1 SOUTH AFRICAN FACULTY (112) %

SA - strongly agree A - agree N - neutral
D - disagree SD - strongly disagree

CULTURAL-BOUND AREAS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

	SA	A	N	D	SD
	5	4	3	2	1
I. EXPECTATIONS AND STANDARDS					
A. Teacher-student communication should be based on formal (rather than informal) interaction.	16	71	4	5	4
B. Dress and cleanliness is important.	23	55	7	10	5
C. If a student is academically unprepared, it is primarily his/her own fault.	33	56	1	2	3
D. Students should have alot of free time.	2	5	18	58	17
E. Respect for authority is important.	37	52	8	3	
F. If a student is caught in an academically dishonest action, he/she should be expelled from school.	26	58	2	12	2
II. APPROACHES	SA	A	N	D	SD
A. I handle emotionally charged issues and conflict by never losing control of myself or my control over the classroom.	14	76	6	4	
B. Humor is essential in the classroom.	5	50	3	33	9
C. I enjoy some students less than others.	20	44	13	17	6
III. PREFERENCES	SA	A	N	D	SD
A. It is important for me to treat students the same. They should never know if I really like them individually.	12	13	6	47	22
B. I prefer group (instead of individual) learning activities.	6	6	12	58	18
C. I prefer docile (instead of aggressive) students.	2	65	8	13	2

"Today we are faced with the pre-eminent fact that, if civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships--the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together and work together, in the same world, at peace."

Franklin D. Roosevelt
April, 1945

ATTACHMENT #2

AMERICAN FACULTY (97) %

SA - strongly agree A - agree N - neutral
D - disagree SD - strongly disagree

CULTURAL-BOUND AREAS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

I. EXPECTATIONS AND STANDARDS	SA	A	N	D	SD
	5	4	3	2	1
A. Teacher-student communication should be based on formal (rather than informal) interaction.	8	22		55	15
B. Dress and cleanliness is important.	6	23	45	15	11
C. If a student is academically unprepared, it is primarily his/her own fault.	5	44	20	25	6
D. Students should have alot of free time.	11	30	14	43	2
E. Respect for authority is important.	11	57	23	7	
F. If a student is caught in an academically dishonest action, he/she should be expelled from school.	9	36	11	41	3
II. APPROACHES	SA	A	N	D	SD
A. I handle emotionally charged issues and conflict by never losing control of myself or my control over the classroom.	8	81	4	13	
B. Humor is essential in the classroom.	14	31	15	30	3
C. I enjoy some students less than others.	19	65	2	14	
III. PREFERENCES	SA	A	N	D	SD
A. It is important for me to treat students the same. They should never know if I really like them individually.	32	36		29	3
B. I prefer group (instead of individual) learning activities.	6	29	2	51	2
C. I prefer docile (instead of aggressive) students.	4	30	22	37	2

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AMERICAN FACULTY - X
SOUTH AFRICAN FACULTY - O

ATTACHMENT #3

SA - strongly agree A - agree N - neutral
D - disagree SD - strongly disagree

CULTURAL-BOUND AREAS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

I. EXPECTATIONS AND STANDARDS	SA	A	N	D	SD
A. Teacher-student communication should be based on formal (rather than informal) interaction.	5	4 O	3	2 X	1
B. Dress and cleanliness is important.	5	4 O	3 X	2	1
C. If a student is academically unprepared, it is primarily his/her own fault.	5	4 XO	3	2	1
D. Students should have alot of free time.	5	4	3	2 XO	1
E. Respect for authority is important.	5	4 XO	3	2	1
F. If a student is caught in an academically dishonest action, he/she should be expelled from school.	5	4 O	3	2 X	1

II. APPROACHES	SA	A	N	D	SD
A. I handle emotionally charged issues and conflict by never losing control of myself or my control over the classroom.	5	4 XO	3	2	1
B. Humor is essential in the classroom.	5	4 XO	3	2	1
C. I enjoy some students less than others.	5	4 XO	3	2	1

III. PREFERENCES	SA	A	N	D	SD
A. It is important for me to treat students the same. They should never know if I really like them individually.	5	4 X	3	2 O	1
B. I prefer group (instead of individual) learning activities.	5	4	3	2 XO	1
C. I prefer docile (instead of aggressive) students.	5	4 O	3	2 X	1

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